

# Keep Close Watch on Vitality's Gas Tank

By WILLIS STEELL.

SINCE the war a slogan popular in Paris applied to the younger generation of both sexes, but with particular emphasis for the *jeune fille*, is "*Conservez votre pétrol*." It means "don't use up your vitality (the gasoline for your auto) uselessly." For the new freedom the war brought to young women in France, where they were once almost cloistered, has left a disastrous effect of too much ardor in the pursuit of work, of pleasure, of what not.

In England the same cause is given for the feverish life spent now by the growing generation. Girls who were in their teens in 1918 did not fail to be caught in the great wave of excitement, with the result that they wasted the last developing season—that well-nigh forgotten poetic period when girlhood and womanhood met—in rushing from one place of amusement to another, dancing, drinking, smoking—in a word, burning up in frivolity what nature meant to be a season of quiet, restful preparation of body and mind for her great work to come later.

## The Haggard Girl of 20.

At twenty the modern society girl is worn out and becomes a haggard bundle of jangled nerves, older in appearance as well as in enduring power than her mother, who was saved by conventions of her day from this premature decay. At least, London moralists so declare.

Dr. Agnes Savile, who is said to be an eminent physician, uttered these criticisms and accompanied them with warnings in a lecture she recently delivered before the Institute of Hygiene in London. A brief of her invective is that the modern girl is becoming poisoned by the hectic life she leads, by her cigarettes, her whiskies and sodas, her cocktails before each meal as well as by her unhealthful meals. "When a girl like this marries, her standard of relationship with her husband and children will not be a high one. After a few years of society life she ages by ten years and already at 20 she is as worn out and nerve tired as a woman of 40."

But this is London, 3,000 miles away. Perhaps the same conditions do not exist in New York. It can do no harm to inquire of the physicians of standing, whose waiting rooms are ordinarily thronged with women, if this disquieting neurotic state is the rule here.

And before doing that why not use one's eyes to see, if it is present to be seen, a new standard of living, perhaps a new view of what used to be called morality?

That a new freedom is common and meets with no objection is plain enough to any spectator of women. He does not need to have the *entree* to what is called society in order to distinguish it; he can see it in all sorts of public places.

Take, for instance, the theater, any well known playhouse on a first night. As the curtain falls on an act there ensues the usual exodus of women and men, but instead of dividing as formerly, when the women lingered in the foyer or sought the dressing room and the men passed the ticket box to the outer hall or even to the street in order to smoke, nowadays both women and men take return checks and the women, escorted or not, calmly light up and smoke with a nonchalance born of custom.

## Girls Smoke Between the Acts

How different it used to be when a woman who was a slave to nicotine had to be helped through the ordeal of a play to a smoke by all sorts of devices! Her intimates would lead her to the dark vicinity of the stage door and there put up barriers of cloak and great coat behind which she could take a couple of whiffs to satisfy her craving.

There is no news in saying that as many women as men smoke cigarettes now. Where they do it still astonishes some simple people. They have invaded the smoking rooms of hotels and playhouses, until men with difficulty find privacy anywhere!

Granting this spread of the once called noxious weed until it seems to have become a necessity of life to most young women, are there present other signs of an increase of neuroticism? Are the girls of

New York anemic, nerve tired, worn out at twenty? Are they broken down by the hectic lives they lead?

The observer who has been honest with himself and has noted what he saw will have to answer these questions in the negative. The young New York girl is a vital creature, nervously equal to all the demands the fast modern life lays upon her. She looks alive as well as pretty when she trips down the aisle of a theater or seats herself in an opera box. She looks alive and very gay and hearty also when she walks on Fifth avenue next afternoon. A succession of teas, dinners, dances, theaters, midnight suppers are not able to knock her out. She tires, perhaps—as who wouldn't and doesn't?—over any long continued round, but a country week end, a day or two at Lakewood or Atlantic City sets her up wonderfully and she starts all over again, as zestfully as at the beginning of a season.

But these encouraging signs may be all on the surface. Beneath may lurk the seeds that may germinate the physical degeneration that constitutes such a serious danger to the race. After all, the doctors should be able to tell, for they look beneath the surface.

## Dr. Morris Talks of Modern Girl.

As an accepted wit, philosopher, critic of life and manners, likewise a physician, Dr. Robert T. Morris seemed a desirable person to put these questions to: Because of hectic life to-day are our debutante girls getting prematurely old? After a few years of society experience does a debutante age by ten years? What reliance can she put in the recuperative powers of youth?

"It is true that a good many young women 19 to 22 years of age do pass through this office for professional advice about how to conserve health and some for serious treatment, but I do not know whether I am quite the right person to generalize about them or the future of the race. My opinions are pretty well known and that I believe that every civilization will leaf out, blossom and then fade; ours is not likely to be an exception. But I should be sorry to predict that our girls will hasten the last process.

"I believe in all sorts of opportunities for the 'sex' and that women of this age should avail of these. Far from there being a noticeable degeneration in our debutantes, the contrary is to be observed—a better, healthier and more self-reliant group than was to be seen in my own early life. I exclude the 'exhibition' class from this grouping. They will not listen to sensible advice; they keep the foot on the gas all the time; they must suffer from debility, premature decay and other evils arising out of excess.

"Girls of twenty are naturally gay; they like to enjoy themselves, and I attach no blame to parents who permit them to do so. There is still prevailing in this country a kind of puritanism which once closed the theaters and frowned on all diverting things. I do not crave the

sustenance of this kind of religion nor the promised future bliss which includes the forced society of bigots. But the 'bon-fire' of which I made mention in 'Microbes and Men' is still burning, and the girls we are speaking of, when at least part of their time is not given to useful occupation, are hurrying toward it. I think the modern tendency of all girls, including those born to 'society,' is to choose some such occupation and divide their time between it and diversion. They are going into all sorts of business and professional life; see the stream of them, daughters of prominent people, who have adopted the stage as a career. Also the amusements of the younger set are a good deal more restricted by convention than was the case immediately after the war. Then what London critics say about their young women might have been more weightily said, I fancy. And perhaps there is still an after effect of the great struggle working harmfully on society girls in England. I can't say as to that.

## New York Girl Fine Physical Specimen.

"But I do know that the New York girl of 20 is on the average a well made, excellent physical specimen with a sane mind in a sane body. She is independent, for she has not forgotten the lessons learned from her elder sister in war time. Then she was 15 or 16 and she saw sister running round New York alone at all hours, driving automobiles, meeting A. E. F. boys returning from abroad at the docks, doing twenty things that their mother would have hesitated to do at that elder sister's age.

"These lessons were not lost on the growing girl and she is profiting by them now that she is emancipated from tutor and chaperon to a degree. She knows that she can go out alone without losing caste, and she knows, too, that she has a wider choice of her friends and amusements than had the girl of the last decade of the nineteenth century. Lecturing, scolding, admonition, won't put her back to that era, for she belongs to her own day.

"And if she dances a little too hard, if she smokes a trifle in excess or does other things somewhat unreasonably, I do not jump to the conclusion that she is aging prematurely by these things. As a physician and a student of nature I know a little more about the recuperative power of youth. It's an elastic thing, youth, and it will rebound from a pretty heavy load."

Two or three blocks below Dr. Morris's another doctor, gray and wise of aspect, held forth in a different strain. He was very sorry to say it, but from his experience the same thing existed here as in Paris and London—a poor race of women, narrow chested and bloodless, was being created by a foolish hectic life.

"I treat many of these young women," said he, "and mainly for a run down condition which ought to be the last thing to expect at their age. It is certainly true that girls of 20 come in here looking and acting as old as their wornout

female relatives, women of 45 or 50, and they require the same treatment, which is dieting and some kind of a rest cure.

"Now, if I tell you how I diagnose these cases and how I cure them will you give me your word not to use my name? I have a right to ask this because in a way what I shall say is a sort of secret in professional ethics.

"Here goes, then," the promise having been given: "These cases of premature physical decay are not due entirely to the life of amusement seeking my patients lead, but to extreme lengths our young girls will go to keep themselves thin. There is scarcely any process too dangerous for them to essay. They'd rather be dead than be fat, and after a long course of starvation most of them are half dead. Thousands upon thousands of fakers in New York are making fortunes by means of formulas to keep young women thin.

"The girls, without consultation with a physician or an older member of the family, go on a diet from which every particle of anything nourishing has been extracted. They never touch bread or potato and they restrict their indulgence in vegetable to spinach and carrots, the latter because they have been told they are good for the complexion and the former because it has iron in it, which produces muscle and not fatty tissue. Milk is, of course, avoided by these foolish virgins.

"The weakening that follows so many of these diets and other dangerous means, including noxious drugs that are taken for the one purpose I have mentioned, lays liable the poor, little innocent to every ailment that blows. Colds are frequent, headaches are constant, and nervous exhaustion is a constant attendant. If I had a daughter who wanted to dance all night and run about all day I would say to her: 'Do these silly things if you must, but while doing them keep yourself well nourished.

"Extreme cases are very difficult to cure, but I am happy to say that in most instances an alarm is taken by the girl's mother in time. She brings the daughter to me and I have a little earnest chat with her. I tell her that there are ways to keep up one's normal energy of body without emaciating the body. I try to convince her that with a little more flesh on her bones she will have a better time in her own game—the society game—than she can ever have after she has made a freak skeleton of her frame and a listless, empty receptacle of her brain. This isn't much of an argument, but it generally serves.

"Let the girls dance all night; dancing is good exercise. Let them run about all day; even getting in and out of an auto is a form of exercise. Let them amuse themselves in frivolous ways; I don't admit this is dangerous so long as they will eat nourishing food and, so to speak, keep the home fires burning."

That the public is deeply interested in the health of its young people is something that needs no exposition; it goes without saying that if the generation of girls who "came out" in society this winter looked like patients from a hospital, pale, worn and feeble, there would be started a crusade to change conditions that caused this kind of debutante. All of us like to read books about how to keep the girls healthy if not taken too ponderously and many of us know that a feverish, excited, amusement seeking life is not the best for anybody. But to say that the prematurely old girl is the rule to-day is an exaggeration that everyone by looking about him can take the sting out of.

## Worry Attacks Young as It Does Old.

Nevertheless the rapid life of the day works havoc in certain kinds of mentality and physique. Neurologists can hardly be blamed for thinking degeneracy in either is increasing because they see so much of it that comes from abnormal living. Dr. Frederick Peterson is one of these who like to puncture the pretension that our youth is inevitably going to the "dogs."

"I have, it is true, treated cases of premature age in girls of 21 or so who ought by nature to be in the prime of their physical life. Some of them have run the social pace that kills, but many more suffer from other causes.

# Here for Higher Education

AN interesting and instructive comparison of the student attendance of the universities and colleges of the various States has just been made by E. J. Mathews, registrar of the University of Texas. He has utilized for this purpose the figures compiled by the United States Bureau of Education and included in a bulletin, "The Residence of Students in Universities and Colleges," prepared by Dr. George F. Zook, specialist in higher education in the bureau.

It is shown that during the session of 1920-21 foreign countries sent to the various institutions of the United States a total of 6,901 students. Students attending independent theological schools and teacher training institutions are excluded from these figures. Of this number, China sent more than any other country, 1,443. The second largest number came from Japan, the total being 525, a total of 396 came from the West Indies, exclusive of Porto Rico.

The colleges and universities of the State of New York proved to be more popular

with foreigners than those of any other state. These institutions, for the year in question, registered a total of 1,256 students living in foreign countries, of whom 261 came from China, 171 from Russia, 162 from Canada, 89 from Japan, 58 from the West Indies, exclusive of Porto Rico, 39 from India, 34 from Mexico, 32 from England, 29 each from Brazil and Poland, 26 each from Turkey and Central America, 25 from Colombia, 24 from South Africa, 22 from Austria, and 18 each from Peru and Jugo-Slavia.

Next in popularity came the state of Illinois, whose institutions received 776 students from foreign countries. Of this number China supplied 244, Canada, 199; Japan, 84; India, 46; Mexico, 19; and Russia 18.

Massachusetts ranked third, receiving 761 foreign students, of whom 173 came from Canada, 145 from China, 60 from Japan, 39 from Norway, 30 from the West Indies, exclusive of Porto Rico, 27 from France, 26 from Mexico, 23 from Russia, 20 from South Africa, and 16 from England.